Head qrs 73d Ills Vol

Nashville Tenn Dec 9th 1864

Dearest Lydia

I have neglected my correspondence with you, or rather I have been so busy, that I have realy had no time to write & I have to steal from the hours of sleep to write this, but I feel that I must do it & can perhaps write nothing better than from my memorandum from the time I left Tullahoma.

The 28d of November we had orders to march at noon.- We had hoped to remain there for the Winter but it soon became evident that Hood was making by us for some more northerly point which made it necessary to concentrate our lines & as I have said the 23d we received orders to March

This Brigade was detailed for rear guard & to the 73d was assigned the Special duty of destroying all stores that could not be removed - quite an amount of Stores had accumulated & the cars were running all day & then were unable to remove it all - after the trains had all left We began the work of destruction

and first on some rations & Sanitary Stores consisting of twenty or thirty barrels of Onions five or six of pickles & as many of Sour Crout, which was burnt & otherwise destroyed, after supplying ourselves with all we wanted: We then found 12 barrels of Ale, the heads were at once broken in & after giving each man all he could drink, the remainder was emptied on the ground. — We now returned to the Court house in the center of the town; all other forces having withdrawn but us Masters of the City

Our Orders were to search the houses for a supply of Salt that was somewhere in the City. We soon found 75 barrels, which was rolled into the Street & burnt — This accomplished I took three companies & picketed the Streets in the direction of the Enemy while the Col quartered the Regt in the Court house, the Col & myself taking lodgings at the "Lemoyne House" where we found a fine old lady with her two daughters anxious to minister to our temporal wants —. Night now closed in upon us & I am inclined to think that Company Commanders did not keep their men in very close quarters for Sundry Sutlers Storekeepers & others who had accumulated goods here & could not get them away came to grief very suddenly. — Whole Cheeses by

the dozen. Boots. Shoes. Coats. Over Coats. & tobacco &
cigars by the wholesale. together with almost Everything. a
sutler keeps was soon transferred to the packs & knapsacks
of the 75th— but little opposition was made to this
transfer of property. & in most cases it was given
out to the boys willingly as they had no means of
taking it away & must be abandoned to the Reb's
& citizens as soon as we left— fifty & even a hundred
dollars was realized by some from property taken in
this way— In the meantime some three hundred thousand
rounds of fixed Ammunition that could not be
removed was deposited in the streets & at 11 o'clock, the
hour having arrived for us to evacuate I recalled the
pickets & as the Left marched away we fired the ammunition
which gave, first the few scattering shots as if skirmishing
which gradually increased until it swelled into the
full volume of a well contested fight, but of course
without the accompanying horrors of the real battle field
We continued as rear guard, marching until
daylight without halting, & then not long enough to
make coffee, — The march was continued through the day
annoyed by continual checks of the train & arrived
at Columbia at 8 o'clock in the evening and
bivouacked in the mud. but thirty six hours without

sleep & hunger without food or coffee, put us in a condition to find no fault with the accomodations if they would but let us be quiet= at this time I had not made a more fatiguing march, thirty three miles without food as to or Coffee is seldom made but tiresome as it was there were many things that seemed to amuse us, Connected with this days march, - About one thousand Contrabands had gathered into Pulaski, & joined us in our rout from that place, presenting a motley group comprising all the colors, shapes & sizes of Ethiopia sons & daughters, from the infant in arms to the venerable Sire with head bleached by the frosts of a century, all bound for that Great Land, the land of their Freedom! Alas! thought I, to how many will it prove a blessing!- the amount of suffering in Store for the most of these poor unfortunates is incalculable, & it is a wise provision that they have been endowed with patience & long Suffering to an Eminent degree

25th In the morning we were put in position in the Suburbs of the town, facing South east where Substantial Works were at once made, and here everything seemed to indicate a degree of good fortune

for the Hd qrs of this Regt, that in its past history had not been so called; our Hd qrs were made in a house near by, & the lady kindly placed her parlor & bed rooms at our disposal, & one promised ourselves a capital nights rest, but, "there's many a slip 'twixt the cup & the lip" — The Maj had joined us here just from home, & while regaling ourselves upon the luxuries he had brot with him, & socially chatting of things present, past & to come, an aide entered with "be sure to move out at once, & away we go to the other side of the town, one & a half miles & camped for the night in the mud & rain, with the wind blowing hard, — this part of the line had been fighting through the day & were hard pressed, — Such is the life of the Soldier, there is but a moment from the grave to the gay or from the lively to the pathetic & tragic

We remained at this place until the night of the 29th meeting works but no fighting was done except on the Skirmish line where we had one man wounded

The night of the 29th in common with the whole army crossed to this side of the river, the rear guard destroying what stores could not be taken away

28th The line of battle formed today, was facing the town &
having for its front the river. = during the day the enemy
made several attempts to throw across a pontoon but under
the destructive fire of our batteries it was impossible &
was soon abandoned & so far as we could see contenting
themselves with watching our movements, keeping up
a random fire

Our retreat from this point took place on the morning of
the 29th about 9 o'clock A.M. & then only a few miles until
this Brigade was again selected for rear guard & flankers
& were placed on a commanding hill covering our right
flank & rear; here we built another line of works & remained
until 9 o'clock in the evening, in fact the whole army
halted near here until this time when the army was
again in motion moving towards Franklin

It appears as was developed that evening that all of
Hoods Cavalry & a part of his Infantry had crossed the
river to our right & were moving rapidly up a pike nearly
parallel with us. & as the advance neared Spring Hill they
were fiercely assailed by the rebel Cavalry but were
handsomely repulsed. Causing only a temporary halt &
no Stampede with the train, although each individual mule
& driver seemed painfully conscious of the immediate &
imminent danger & were hurrying forward with all

possible speed: When this Brigade reached this point it was all quiet & we passed through leaving some part of the 2nd Div to bring up the rear: During the remainder of the nights march some part of the Column was constantly annoyed by Rebel Cavalry firing from the adjoining fields, & near the head of the train a few wagons were burned & mules shot but doing no serious damage. — During all this nights march, all or nearly all of Hoods force were encamped but two or three miles to the right of Spring Hill, their Campfires showing a pretty strong force, & when I saw their fires & found them in force so near us, I thought the worst visions of an involuntary visit to Dixie & the gloomy walls of Libby loomed up before me, & I was not the only one that thought so, for I am told upon the best authority that serious thoughts were entertained of abandoning the Artillery & Wagons at this place, & it is conceded by all that they missed their opportunity in not attacking us in force during this night

We however reached Franklin about 11 o'clock A.M. of the 30th & found the troops garrisoned at this place as well as well as those who had come in advance of us busily engaged in throwing up Earth Works — I was at once assigned to a position in the line & began our Works

Our boys were very tired & sleepy & had already built so many lines of works, over which they had not been permitted to fire a shot, that they had no heart in it. & grumbling & complaints were heard, a' thing that an old soldier seldom does however at 4 P.M. we had tolerable works — at 5 the rear of our army was in Franklin

During the quiet the Col & some others had availed themselves of the opportunity & had snatched a few hours sleep but for me there was no such good luck as it was the last of the month & several reports due I had to work.

The position chosen was admirably adapted for defense it being in a semi circle, in an open forest ground. with the flanks resting on the river

At 2 o'clock the Johns burst upon us like a thunderbolt — the cry of "the rebs are coming & are driving in our pickets" together with the immediate rattle of Musketry which, on our left soon swelled into loud & continuous volleys brot. every man to his post. — Casting my eyes to the front. I saw the rebel line of battle, preceded by a strong line of Skirmishers, rapidly, yet steadily & in good order moving down upon us, driving in our pickets as they advanced — our pickets are now all in, formed at a double quick they come, redeeming their fine

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The excitement is now intense but our command is "hold your fire until you get the order" — on they come until within a hundred yards, when the cry rings out "Fire by file" Battalion Ready; Fire! but it was almost a volley — they waver; many fall — they halt — they break — they rally — Steadily & Silently each man loads his piece, & now Tactics having played out — "give it to them boys, give them Hell" & it is done with a vengeance completely routing & driving them back in confusion

So ended the charge upon this Regt. resulting in two loss to us, but to them, although not positively known to us, must have been heavy

Further to our left, in the front of one Brig of our Div & in front of the 23d Corps a Series of charges was made Eleven in all, & as many times resulting in disaster to them. We were momentarily expecting a Repetition of their assault on us & were constantly on the alert until Midnight, when everything but a Skirmish line was quietly withdrawn & crossed the river headed for Nashville — To Col Bonner was assigned the important yet difficult task of drawing in the Skirmish line & acting as rear guard also of destroying the bridges, which he

accomplished without accident, the enemy followed him closely however, & appeared on the opposite bank & tried to extinguish the flames & save the bridge, but the guard, together with a battery made it too hot for them

In the vicinity to clear the town with all possible speed wagons Ambulances, Artillery & troops had been hurried across the river & were now in one confused jumbled mass, Mixed up with much loud talking & hard swearing, but the troops taking to the fields & giving up the roads to the wagons & Artillery, order was soon restored & the living Mass was soon moving with creditable speed towards the "City of Rocks". nor did we halt for anything to eat or drink until noon of the next day Dec 1st

Our sufferings from the loss of sleep were intense. two days & this was the 2d night without sleep & with only one meal of victuals during the time was taxing nature to the utmost limits of endurance — I repeatedly fell asleep while riding along & if I dismounted it was not much better. — Many of the men walking by my side were soon asleep & snoring as loud as if in their camp beds

We arrived here about three oclock Dec 1st & you may safely believe I did some tall sleeping between that & the next morning

Dec 3d yesterday I was taken with one of my longest time

fits. such as were common with me at one time

giddiness & blindness, followed by a killing sick headache, nothing dangerous, but as the Chirurgeons say "powerful uncomfortable." At ten A.M. - then being under orders to change camp, the Col gave me permit to go to the City & make myself as comfortable as I could. The Surgeon ordered me into the hospital but I did not go, but took lodgings at a hotel where I remained until nearly night to day, when I returned to camp

Dec 4th Nothing occurred to day, except that we received orders to allow no citizen or straggling soldier around our camp, but arrest them & set them to work on our fortifications, & it being Sunday, thousands of citizens were strolling around to see what they could, & run right in to a trap, & before night we had very fine works

It afforded our boys a great deal of sport to see those nice old fellows from town dig in the ditches, who had probably never handled a spade before in their lives

Dec 5th The Regt was detailed for picket to day & remained out 24 hours, no demonstrations

Dec 6th Peace & quietness prevails in our front, but to our right & near or on the river some heavy fighting has taken place to day, - that the Johnneys have been whipped again, is all we have heard

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Dec 12th

I have not had time to finish this letter, & now we have orders to be ready to move at a moments notice & as the mail is just going out I will add a word & send it

there is going to be a big fight or a foot race but we will not be the ones to run this time

If we do not go to morrow I will write you again — I haven't said anything in this that I wanted to. but I am as ever your loving Husband

O. K. French